

EVALUATION GUIDE

Assessing Community Programs



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WALK TEXAS!



Evaluation Guide

WALK TEXAS! is a community-based program with the mission to promote the health of Texans by increasing awareness and opportunities for individuals to engage in regular physical activity, especially walking. The Evaluation Guide provides basic information about how to evaluate the success of a walking program or other types of community-based efforts.

Because most organizations follow a *Plan, Do, Check, Act* cycle to systematize program development, the Walk Texas! guides are organized around this cycle and are meant to compliment each other.

Evaluation involves making judgments about ideas, solutions, methods, or materials that your program uses. Evaluating your programs or activities can tell you what works well and what may be improved. The information also can show the best investment of your organization's time and money, that is, evaluations can explain what activities have the biggest pay off.

While you can evaluate a short-term program once at its end, you may want to consider setting up several mini-evaluations or assessments for longer-term events, perhaps those lasting more than four months. In doing this, you can make mid-course corrections and celebrate the successes along the way.



WHY FOCUS ON EVALUATION

Continually evaluating your efforts and your program provides several advantages:

- ★ You can monitor what is working and what needs to be improved. This allows you to capitalize on successes and address problem areas.
- ★ You can demonstrate to partners and funders how your efforts are supporting your goals and objectives.
- ★ You can use information from your evaluations to plan future programs.

Other guides in this series include:

- ★ Quick Start Guide to a Physically Active Organization
- ★ Media Guide: Navigating Media Relations
- ★ Planning Guide for Community Events
- ★ Walking/Biking Guide: Advocating for Environmental Change



WHAT IS EVALUATION

Most programs follow a cycle of *Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA)*. This allows an organization to define its purpose, carry out its mission, analyze its successes, and make improvements.

Plan by setting goals and writing objectives based on organizational mission and client needs

Do by trying out/implementing plan in the community

Check during and after implementation to find out what happened

Act by making the successful implementations permanent and by improving the less successful

Evaluation occurs during the *Check* part of the *PDCA* cycle. It offers a way to judge whether your 'planning' and 'doing' produced the results you intended. Making judgments about the success or shortcomings of a program is possible only when criteria have been established and then measured. Therefore, an important component of evaluation includes measurement and data collection. Define in the most precise terms possible the object you are measuring, whether it is the number of participants in an activity, the average score on a post-test, or the satisfaction level of your clients. After all, you want to make sure you're counting or examining the right thing. Later in this Evaluation Guide, you will find more information about writing objectives since they are important to the design of your evaluation.

There are several criteria on which programs are evaluated:

- ★ Contribution to organizational mission and goals
- ★ Achievement of learning objectives
- ★ Perceptions of the participants

Contribution to goals:

To establish how successfully a program contributes to organizational goals, the evaluation must begin with data and measurement questions. Think about which items or activities offer concrete information about the program. For example, you might want to ask, "How has this program supported our mission statement?" Then ask whether the answer is sufficient to justify continuing the activity as it is or whether it shows that you may need to adjust the activity.



Achievement of learning objectives:

The best programs or activities are designed to have participants demonstrate new knowledge and change targeted behaviors. The easiest way to evaluate this is to measure learning achievements. This type of evaluation requires that each participant be tested on each learning objective listed for the program. Often, evaluations may use a pre-test to measure participant knowledge/behavior before the program and then a post-test to measure the same information afterwards.

Perceptions of the participants:

Knowing the extent to which participants valued or appreciated the program can be part of your evaluation. Ask questions that give the participants the opportunity to share what they liked about the program, as well as what they believe could be improved.



HOW TO CONDUCT AN EVALUATION

Ideally, evaluation starts as soon as you begin designing your program and involves identifying baseline measurements. That is, in order to know whether or how something has improved, you first have to know what you're beginning with. Remember that evaluation costs something—thought, time, money, energy—therefore, it must appear in budgets and documentation at the earliest point possible.

Steps in Evaluation

1. Define your purpose: to gain insight; to change practice; to assess effects
2. Identify the users
3. Identify the uses/application
4. Determine measurement methods
5. Gather data
6. Draw conclusions and make judgments based on data
7. Write the report

Define your Purpose

When deciding to evaluate your program or activity, clearly define what you hope to achieve through your efforts. Do you need to know how many clients your program affected? Has the information you shared with participants helped them change their habits? Think about WHY you want the information.

Identify the Users

You can conduct your evaluation with certain users in mind. Perhaps only you and your coworkers will see the results. Or maybe you will share your successes with potential funders. As you plan your evaluation, keep in mind WHO your audience is.

Identify the Uses

Evaluations are carried out for many reasons, for example, to use for planning next year's program; to justify this year's expenses; or to prove that your methods help participants change their behaviors. As you plan your data collection and analysis, decide HOW you can use the results and information.

Determine Measurement Methods

Measurement relies on either quantitative or qualitative data collection—or a combination of both. Quantitative data focuses on capturing the numbers related to your program—perhaps the average pounds lost in a walking group or the total number of minutes exercised. Qualitative data provides the human interest dimension—the words that people use to describe your program. Clients, community members, coalition members, or business partners can offer descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses of your program. As you consider measurement, determine WHAT data will offer a thorough description of your program.

Gather Data

After you have your plan of what data to gather, begin collecting the information. Ideally, this will occur as close to the beginning of the program as possible. You may want to collect base line measurements or pre-tests so that you have something to compare to the end measurements.

Draw Conclusions

After you have completed your data collection, sift through all of your sources of information and begin to judge what you have. Look for trends in the data. For example, do the numbers demonstrate that a certain component of the program was successful in changing behavior (quantitative data)? Does a certain type of quotation appear over and over (qualitative data)? Also recognize surprises among the measurement. What might have happened in your program that you weren't expecting? When you have identified the trends and surprises in your data, you can begin to put together a story of what happened.

Write the report

As you write up a report based on your conclusions, again consider who your audience is. Write it so that it provides the information that your audience needs. If you include

as much detail and data as you can along with your conclusions, then you offer a more grounded story. Keep in mind that the evaluation report should:

- ★ Take into account all of your stakeholders
- ★ Offer a means for you to reflect on events
- ★ Address the extent to which you reached your work plan or goals
- ★ Provide details about program/activity quality
- ★ Account for any discrepancies between your goals and your results
- ★ Identify barriers that your program faced
- ★ Specify any improvements you intend to make



HOW TO WRITE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES THAT CAN BE MEASURED AND EVALUATED

Objectives provide written guidance toward goals. They specify what your efforts are and what you hope will happen as a result. They are specific, measurable, and include a time frame. All objectives—and programs—should be **SMART**.

S = Specific: What exactly are we going to do, with or for whom?

M = Measurable: Is it measurable and do we have capacity to measure it?

A = Achievable: Can we get it done in the allotted time?

R = Relevant: Will the objective lead to the desired outcome?

T = Time-bound: When will we accomplish the objective?

As you write your objectives, think about the kind of evaluation you think will be most helpful for your audience. That means considering both the purpose of the evaluation, as described above, and the type of questions that best address those purposes. The following roles and questions may help you guide you:

Tourist:	Where am I now and where do I want to go?
Healthcare Professional:	What is the problem so I can find a remedy?
Detective:	What are the facts?
Car mechanic:	How do I troubleshoot this problem?
Financial planner:	What are my top goals and dreams?
Social Worker:	What do I perceive?

Below are some examples of objectives. The *Incomplete Objectives* lack the details suggested by **SMART** and fail to address the specifics of the program. The *Comprehensive Objectives* use the same program and provide specific and measurable details that are the hallmark of well-written objectives.

Incomplete Objective: We will initiate a walking program with parents, elementary-aged students, and teachers.

Comprehensive Objective: We will initiate a weekly, one-hour walking program that tracks the cumulative mileage for each participant using activity logs so that throughout the year we can determine total miles achieved.

Incomplete Objective: We will increase the number of restaurants offering healthful nutrition literature.

Comprehensive Objective: We will approach 25 restaurants in our county to maintain a display of healthful nutrition literature, including pamphlets on serving size and the food pyramid. Our program contact information also is included. We aim to achieve at least 50% participation. Each month, our staff will call the restaurants to ensure that the literature is available. We will ask clients coming into our office whether they have seen our displays and if they took the information into consideration when making their meal selection. Our goal is for 12% of clients to report that they have learned of our services from restaurant displays.

Incomplete Objective: We will offer a decision-making class.

Comprehensive Objective: Our center will enroll 15 participants in a 4-hour decision-making class to be held on February 1, 2006. Participants will take a pre-test to assess their level of understanding about the types of decision-making and will take a post-test immediately after the class to determine their grasp of the new concepts. Another post-test will be administered one month after the class to determine how much knowledge the participants retain.



TYPES OF OBJECTIVES

There are several types of objectives, based on how much change you intend to produce. The descriptions below offer guidelines about writing the various objectives.

Process Objective: Specifies how the change will occur or how things will be done. Focus is on participants, interactions, and activities.

Answers the question: How will you make it happen?

Actor: Staff

Time Frame: Short-term

Objective Includes: Actor, Action, Target of Action, Measurement, Time frame

Example: By August 2005 project manager will provide a series of four 5-A-Day training classes, including a pre- and post-test, to 20 parents of elementary school students.

Sample Language: train, provide, collaborate, enroll

Impact Objective: Specifies the result of the change or event. Focus is on creating opportunities for change in participant knowledge, attitude, or behavior.

Answers the question: How have clients changed because of your action?

Actor: Staff; clients; participants

Time Frame: Mid-term (≤ 3 years)

Objective Includes: Actor, Target of Action, Measurement, Time frame

Example: By August 2008 a minimum of 45% of clients will be able to identify appropriate serving sizes.

Sample Language: Staff gain commitment from, implement

Clients identify, consistently exercise, choose, demonstrate understanding

Outcome Objective: Specifies the end-result to be achieved because of the change. Focus is on creating system, environmental, or population change in rates of disability or mortality.

Answer the question: What is different in the system because of your action?

Actor: Unspecified—the focus is on the system rather than who creates the change

Time Frame: Long-term (3 + YEARS)

Objective Includes: Target of Action, Measurement, Time frame

Example: By December 2010 the rate of obesity in the county will decrease by 5% as measured by county data.

Sample Language: to reduce, to decrease, to lower, to improve

EVALUATION GLOSSARY

Baselines: Where you start/where you are. You have to know this before you know how far you've come and how far until you get where you want to be.

Evaluation: The process of making judgments about data you have collected for a program or activity.

Goal: The state, condition, or status of a system. They are non-specific, non-measurable.

Example: People with diabetes or at risk of diabetes will make healthful nutrition choices the majority of the time.

Example: People with diabetes or at risk of diabetes will eat 5-7 fruits and vegetables most days.

Instruments: The tools of measurement that involve some form of test, either by paper and pencil or by performance.

Measurement: The process of gathering data.

One-way communication: Speaking out to clients without encouraging discussion and learning; does not support changes in client behavior.

System: A combination of different parts that work on their own and in relation to each other in order to serve a common purpose. When they work together, the parts make up a larger whole.

Example: As diabetes advocates, we're parts of different groups: our own offices, the state agency, and other community health organizations. When you talk about the offices, agency, and organizations, you can describe them as parts of a system that focus on decreasing the prevalence and complications of diabetes.

System Change: Systems change as a result of meeting goals through key activities, process objectives, and impact objectives.

Example: If a CDSP meets its impact objective of implementing an on-going weekly 1-hour walking program at a worksite that is led by a worksite employee, then the CDSP has created a system change.

Two-way communication: Talking with participants in a way that supports their learning and on-going participation; supports system change.

Sources for Gathering Information Needed for your Evaluation

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)

Client feedback

County/State data

Direct observation

Focus groups

Hospital/Clinic Data

Individual Tracking Forms

Personal interviews

Written surveys (pre-tests; post-tests; satisfaction surveys)

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

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